

First Crane-Balestier Letter

New York, November 13, 1861

Dear Balestier.

The declaration you made last evening, that a portion of your proposed address discusses the question of a separation of the Grand Lodge, has caused me to consider the matter very seriously and induced me to communicate with you on the subject.

After mature reflection, I am convinced that every allusion to this delicate question, will be fraught with mischief and will meet the hearty disapproval of every member of Holland Lodge.

The action of our lodge in 1855 had for its purpose the establishment of a City Grand Lodge and consequently, a division of the Grand Lodge of the State, and you well know the costs of such action, and how the Lodge suffered, in the attempt and how signally it failed.

At that time there appeared to be some just ground for such action, for there were two Bodies, each claiming to be a Grand Lodge and there were grave doubts in the minds of many which was entitled to be considered the Parent Body.

Indeed, Masons hailing from this State, were refused admittance into Lodges, of other jurisdictions and added to the fact, that two Grand Lodges were exercising their authority in this City, was a sufficient reason, that Holland Lodge should desire that a settlement of this separation should be made, taking the position that the difficulty should be settled either by a Union of the rival Bodies or by a separate City Grand Lodge.

The former, happily was the result, and now peace and harmony reign, throughout this great jurisdiction, and there is no cause for complaint, as the laws and edicts of the Grand Body, are just, alike to all members of this vast Masonic Family.

Under these circumstances, it appears to me that it will be highly improper even to broach the subject in a public address before the Lodge delivered at the request of its members and for a specific purpose.

It will engender hard feelings and arouse a spirit, which we have labored long to subdue, and again bring our ancient and distinguished Lodge into disrepute and to cause to degrade it in the estimation of the true Mason, than aught else that can be suggested.

The question of a division of the Grand Lodge, should not be discussed in a subordinate lodge, but if any one desires to test the feeling of the Grand Body, on that question, the proper place is in the Grand Lodge itself.

To me this whole subject savours too much of the spirit of secession from and rebellion against the authority of the Grand Lodge, which Body at the time of the Union expressly declared "that there is but one Grand Lodge and but one Grand Master in the State of New York."

Clearly implying that its existence depended on itself and not upon the whims and caprices of others.

But I will not pursue the subject further, but simply make a request, (which I feel warranted in believing that you will grant,) that you will strike out all that portion of your address that touches upon the subject of a division of the Grand Lodge.

I do this, so that we all agree and that you may give additional evidence of the loyalty of Holland Lodge to the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the State of New York to which it owes allegiance.

Truly and Fraternally Yours

John J. Crane

Please let me know your views.

Second Crane-Balestier Letter

November 19, 1861

My dear Balestier.

In reply to your truly fraternal note of the fourteenth instant, I will explain to you, the position of Holland Lodge relative to its acts in 1855.

The first step that was taken, had for its express purpose, the formation of a City Grand Lodge.

Four Masters of Lodges pledged themselves to me, that if Holland would take the initiative in this declaration of independence, that they would surely follow and then having five Lodges, we could proceed to form a City Grand Lodge.

It was our misfortune to hold the first meeting, when we proceeded to fulfil our part of the compact but Eureka Lodge following next proved faithless to her vow and the project failed.

Then having declared ourselves free from the government of the parent Body, we were obliged to take position as an Independent Lodge and not acknowledge ourselves dupes of designing men or rather of those who owed their influence entirely to Masonry, and hence could not afford to be under the ban of censure even for a short time.

I am surprised to find that you are not informed upon this part of our history. I will be pleased at any time to give you a detailed account of the whole affair, in order that you may have a full understanding of the condition of matters at that time.

Should you perchance meet Right Worshipful Brother Holmes, he will be able to provide more information on the subject as he was a Mason at that time and Master of a Lodge.

With regard to the right of a Lodge to discuss the subject of a division of the Grand Body, I should perhaps modify my position and add that in an address before a Lodge where Grand Officers are invited and members of several Lodges are present, I aver, that it would be highly improper for anyone to allude to this knotty question as it would tend to arouse unpleasant feelings and array one against another, "wounding one in the house of his friends."

That a Lodge may within itself discuss the propriety of a division of the Grand Body, unless the matter is brought before it, by its representatives in the Grand Lodge, I still believe to be injurious, contrary to the articles of Union, and a direct violation of the Constitution.

The allusion to the remarks, that I made in public relative to the conduct of the Lodge in 1855 and my participation in those scenes, is not an argument against my present declaration.

I stated that under the same circumstances with the same causes existing -- two Grand Lodges, brethren refused admission -- I would pursue the same line of conduct, as indicated by me at that time, believing that I would thereby effect union of the discordant Elements.

The assertion that I was delivering a lecture to you is to say most unkind, as it was farthest from my thoughts. I am sending these kind and earnest measures at the request of others, only to bring the subject strongly before your mind, that you might see the propriety of the objections I had made and “be governed accordingly.”

Again you allude to the fact of my being a high position and remark “that you are still Master of Holland Lodge and it is not kind for any to say that your opinion will opposed by every member of the Lodge.” I intended no offense but was giving my reasons for addressing you especially and still believe that my assertion is correct and that all by opposed to the discussion and not your opinion, for these have not yet been expressed, and consequently there is no occasion for any argument on that point.

I have thus briefly explained my note, desiring to convince you that it was prompted by a desire to avoid anything that might occasion remark or bring censure upon us from any quarter. It was not intended anything more than a friendly conversation and it should not have been considered by you in any other light.

In regard to the other subject of representation - on that I have no desire to express any opinion in that it is a question already before the Grand Lodge and is very properly a subject of discussion. There is a vast difference between the discussion between the existence of a body and that which has for its object a change of representation. The one seeks to annihilate, the other to change, and thereby add to its growth and influence and this latter very properly should be discussed and elicit the opinions of all.

You will pardon me for this intruding upon your valuable time, but I am unwilling that you should entertain opinions so contrary to what I have desired to convey, for we both have a mutual desire to add to the dignity and position of our time honored Lodge and neither would do aught to detract in any manner from its influence or degrade it in the opinion of worthy and high-minded Masons.

Truly and fraternally yours,

J.J. Crane

Excerpt from Holland Minutes, January 25 1858

The Standing Committee presented their report. A motion was made to receive and place upon the minutes.

Bro. J.H. Anthon moved as an amendment the following: that the report be recommitted and the following words be stricken out: “the Standing Committee earnestly urges upon them our brethren who are not fully satisfied with our present position as being the best which under the circumstances we can make it, also upon all who intend hereafter to agitate this vexed question of jurisdiction also upon all who for whatever reason do not feel themselves to be in true Masonic harmony withdraw from Membership”

The question being taken upon the amendment, it was lost.

Bro. Spaulding then moved to lay the Report upon the table. Lost.

The question then put upon the original Resolution which was unanimously adopted.

Report of the Standing Committee was as follows:

The Standing Committee in accordance with the resolution passed at your last communication respectfully report: that they have deliberately considered the situation in which we are placed, with an earnest desire to recommend some course of action that might prove satisfactory to every member of the Lodge, and enable us to continue harmonious and united.

It is well known to all of you that a Mason hailing from the State of N.Y. is not a Free and Accepted Mason the world over or even in the United States.

Masons hailing from any grand Lodge in this State are considered clandestine by some Grand Lodges and no Grand Lodge acknowledge all Masons from New York as entitled to all the privilege and benefits of Masonry.

The question for us to decide is what course shall this Lodge pursue to benefit not only herself but all the Masonic Bodies in the State. When we withdrew our allegiance to the Willard Body it was not to gratify personal feeling, but from a sincere desire to heal up all the difficulties existing in the State: in that we failed, and failed by the treachery of other Lodges that now hail under the Willard Grand Lodge.

Your Committee are satisfied that the Phillips Grand Lodge under which we work are legally, equitably and Masonically, the Grand Lodge of the State of New York, although in a minority, might does not make right.

We fully admit that the Lewis Grand Lodge can at the present time give to its members more Masonic privileges and benefits than the Phillips Grand Lodge but even they cannot make a Mason that will be recognized wherever Masonry is known.

The Lodges in this city are now agitating the question whether if the plans they have presented for a Union cannot be consummated, whether they should not pursue the same course we did when we seceded. All Masons in this City as dissatisfied with the position they hold; they hope to be relieved by urging upon the respective Grand Bodies the benefit arising from a Union.

In order to aid understanding of the question, let us ascertain exactly the present position of Holland Lodge No. 8 in its relations to the Fraternity at large and to the bodies claiming to be Grand Lodges.

It will not be necessary to put on record the reasons which induced this Lodge to separate from the body then known as the Willard Grand Lodge. Those reasons were beyond doubt abundant to justify that step by which we became independent of both bodies.

The act was Rebellion we grant, but Rebellion was a necessity and it therefore became a fact.

We did not long retain this position, we tendered our allegiance to that Venerable body under whose jurisdiction we not hail because it seemed that the long continued Feud between the two Bodies was about to be settled, and we were anxious to obtain with them the advantage of the general pacification.

It must not be forgotten that the schism which originally caused the Grand Lodge to divide into two Bodies was of the same nature as that which caused us to withdraw our allegiance from the Willard body, viz., the tyranny and usurpation exercised by the Rural Districts over the City, neither must it be forgotten that in the late attempt at settlement the City Lodges in both Bodies were nearly unanimous in agreeing to the terms proposed by the joint Committees; and the Country with its accustomed Bigotry went en masse against these terms.

Our sympathies therefore (not to state other weighty reasons for adhering to our present Grand Lodge) were necessarily and naturally with the Great City resisters of moral tyranny, and we are really in our proper and natural place in acknowledging our present Jurisdiction.

The Committee announces that the Worshipful Master of the Lodge after a calm review of all the circumstances and with a sincere desire that all the members of this Lodge who desire to do so should receive all the advantages which they can possibly receive under our divided and deranged Grand Lodge jurisdiction, will if members unanimously vote that he shall do, surrender to the persons claiming to be Grand Master and Deputy Grand Master of the other Body, the Warrant, Books, and Properties of this Lodge. But W.M. considers that so long as a sufficient number of Master Masons can be found in our ancient Lodge who can legally continue its existence, and who demand now that the warrant shall be preserved and the existence of the Lodge continued, that he has no right whatsoever to deprive them of the power of so doing, no matter how small the minority, they have the right to continue the existence of the Lodge and all others have the right to withdraw.

For it will be seen that we cannot in a body now transfer our allegiance to the Willard body. Let us be clearly understood on this point. In the first place they deny that we are Holland Lodge No. 8, they say that Holland Lodge No. 8 is now regularly with them.

If they say you wish to be restored to the rights and benefits of Masonry and to membership in any Lodge the following must be your course.

First, that Holland Lodge did expel you from Masonry, she cannot again restore you, but the Grand Lodge can. You may go back, make submission and ask to be restored, the new Holland Lodge will no doubt restore most of you to membership after the Grand Lodge has restored you. You must also pass the ordeal of the ballot box.

Second, surrender your forfeited Warrant and effects, acknowledge the wrong that you have done and petition the Grand Lodge to restore you. If the Grand Lodge does this, it will have the effect of making you eligible for affiliation with any Lodge, but the Grand Lodge does not possess the power to restore you as members of Holland Lodge No. 8.

As to those persons whom you have initiated, passed or raised since your Rebellion, the Grand Lodge will probably permit them to be healed without formally being made over again.

It is therefore clear that submission to the Willard Body involves a total annihilation of our present organization though doubtless with the exception of some the members of this body would be gladly absorbed by the new Holland Lodge No. 8.

The case has now been fully stated and the Lodge must now determine its course.

It has been suggested that if the number of those members who insist upon the right of preserving the existence of this Lodge should be very small they will probably resign their membership, but if they should not do so then the Standing Committee earnestly urges upon them our brethren who are not fully satisfied with our present position as being the best which under the circumstances we can make it, also upon all who intend hereafter to agitate this vexed question of jurisdiction also upon all who for whatever reason do not feel themselves to be in true Masonic harmony withdraw from Membership.

Finally the Standing Committee for themselves say that whatever may be decided upon whether separation or otherwise they will nourish no unkindness of feeling. They will consider their separation as temporary. They will seek all honorable means for reunion and for healing up all dissensions not merely in our Body but between the rival Grand Bodies; and they earnestly and affectionately ask every brother of this Lodge to permit no heart burning, no jealousies, no words, no acts of unkindness to be developed and that no matter what course may be adopted our private lives may remain as before unstained by ill will, and our Friendship unbroken.

Signed Alex Frear, Henry Walters, J.J. Crane M.D., F. Fawcett, A.H. Bartlett, of the Standing Committee.

Brother J.N. Balestier offered the following resolution which on motion was adopted and ordered upon the minutes.

Whereas it appears by an address and resolution adopted August 13th 1855 and published to the Masonic world that Holland Lodge No. 8 then threw off its allegiance to the Willard Grand Lodge declared itself "Free & Independent" and whereas this Lodge also declared in said address that it would feel itself entitled to no respect if it longer submitted to the oppression of said Grand Lodge, and further that it would never recede from the path which Masonic honor and Masonic duty urged it to pursue, and whereas said Grand Lodge has done no single act to conciliate this Lodge but on the contrary has driven us forth from our Lodge rooms, has chartered by our name another body which has undertaken to expel and degrade the members of this Lodge, and has recently trampled once more in the City Lodges by refusing to ratify the Compact of Union adopted by competent committee, appointed by itself and the Herring Grand Lodge:

Therefore be it resolved that no reason compatible with honor and self respect can under existing circumstances be assigned for the spontaneous return of this Lodge to the jurisdiction of said Willard Grand Lodge.

And whereas in the summer of the year 1857 in view of the adoption of the aforesaid Compact of Union the officers of this Lodge (whose acts we subsequently ratified) sought and obtained an honorable and fraternal connection with said Herring Grand Lodge and whereas said Grand Lodge holding the original Charter and archives of the Grand Lodge of the State declared that our name had never released their jurisdiction over us and that we were and had ever been in good standing on their records,

And whereas the said Grand Lodge was pleased to release us from pecuniary dues and to dedicate our new Lodge rooms, and whereas brethren working under the jurisdiction of said Grand Lodge have constantly visited our Lodge, have hired and still hire our Lodge rooms, to our present advantage and relief

And whereas the whole conduct of said Grand Lodge and its subordinate lodges towards us has been of the most friendly & courteous character,

Wherefore be it resolved:

That however much we may differ in opinion as to the expedience of our Union with the Herring Grand Lodge there ought not to be two opinions with respect to our duty towards this Body, and accordingly we do declare that good faith and manly dealing require that we should not in any event renounce our allegiance to said Grand Lodge without the full free and unsolicited concurrence and advice thereof.

And whereas it has been suggested that this Lodge should become a party to a fusion with the body bearing our name chartered by the Willard Grand Lodge and that also without any previous action of our reconciliation with the said Grand Lodge

Therefore be it Resolved:

First, that when we seek to unite again with the Willard Grand Lodge we should seek to do so in a manner less degrading than that of merging this ancient and honorable Lodge in an organization as little untitled to our respect as our regard

Secondly, that the only consistent and logical ground which now exists for returning to the jurisdiction of said Grand Lodge is our repentance of past errors and if we feel such repentance we ought as men of character frankly to ask forgiveness and not to enter unforgiven and despised by any back door, a jurisdiction which we have spurned and defied and which has never since sought or apparently desired our fellowship.

[Bro Henning demitted]

[21 members suspended NPD]

“The R.W. Grand Lodge was present but did not visit the Lodge and desired their intentions of so doing entered upon the minutes.”

Transcription by Bro. Bradley Corsello, bradcorsello@gmail.com